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ABSTRACT

In the United Kingdom in 1977 a national questionnaire survey was conducted by the University of Sheffield (England) under the direction of Frank Whitehead with children ages 10-14 years old to discover the kind and extent of children's voluntary reading. In 1994/95, Whitehead's study was replicated in the context of the 1990s. This report summarizes the findings of that project the W.H. Smith Children's Reading Choices Project at the University of Nottingham. A national questionnaire postal survey was conducted with 7,976 children 10, 12, and 14 years old in 110 primary (5-11 years) and 59 secondary (11-16/18 years) schools in 1994. To supplement the questionnaire, follow-up interviews were conducted in 1995 with just over 1% of the sample in different schools throughout the country. There were 24 main findings, of which the first six were: (1) over the last two decades book reading has increased for 10 year olds of both sexes, and for 12 year old girls; it has remained at the same level for 12 year old boys and 14 year old girls, but it has declined for 14 year old boys; (2) the average number of books read by children in the four weeks prior to the survey was 2.52; (3) most children read regularly, but there is a tendency towards fewer books read as children get older; (4) more girls than boys read books regularly; (5) there is a clear pattern of decline in the amount of book reading from higher to lower socioeconomic groups; and (6) children have very eclectic reading tastes. (NKA)

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ED 474 620

The Children's Reading Choices Project.

By Christine Hall and Martin Coles

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CS 511 884

The Children's Reading Choices Project

at The University of Nottingham
sponsored by W H Smith plc

Summary Report

The summary report to W.H. Smith plc of the research project on children's voluntary reading habits, ages 10 -14, carried out at the School of Education, The University of Nottingham, 1994 / 95.

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Sue Content, Anthea Roberts, Jackie Pattison, Joe Saunders, Stephan Saunders.

A major debt of gratitude is to the 7976 pupils of the schools who completed the questionnaire, the headteachers and teachers who administered the survey and and to those schools and pupils who agreed to take part in the interview phase of the project.

We received useful guidance and sympathetic support from the steering group at W H Smith plc during the course of the project and would like to thank in this regard: Nicci Krolikwski, Michael Mackenzie, Carol Gill, Lois Beeson, Julie Randles, and Neil McClelland from the National Literacy Trust.

This report contains headline information and analysis. Further details and analysis will be forthcoming in book form. Meanwhile more information is available from either Chris Hall or Martin Coles at The

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Preface

In 1971 in England the Schools Council commissioned an enquiry which sought to discover the extent and kind of children's voluntary reading, what satisfactions they seek from books and magazines, and what environmental factors influence their choice. A national questionnaire survey was conducted by the University of Sheffield under the direction of Frank Whitehead (Whitehead 1977) with some 8000 children of 10, 12, and 14 years old in 193 primary and 188 secondary schools. To supplement the written questionnaire, follow-up interviews were held with 576 children in 34 different schools throughout the country.

It is now over twenty years since we acquired information on children's voluntary reading habits. In those two decades there have been dramatic shifts in children's leisure habits and interests and in the cultural climate generally. Such things as changes in the quantity and content of television viewing , the advent of microcomputers, and the marketing of music and fashion for younger children made it seem likely that the 1971 findings did not relate to today's children. For instance in 1971 the named favourite writer of all children in each age- and sex-grouping was Enid Blyton, and the favourite four periodicals/comics were *Dandy, Beano, Buntie* and *Jackie.* The most widely read book at ages 12 and 14 was *Little Women.* One of the recommendations of the 1971 survey was that similar surveys should be carried out at ten year intervals.

It seemed important to us, especially in the light of current political concerns about reading generally, that monitoring of children's reading habits should continue. We set out therefore to replicate the Whitehead study in the context of the 1990s. This report summarises the findings of that project, the*W H Smith Children's Reading Choices Project,* the first major in-depth study of children's voluntary reading in the U.K. since Whitehead's.

A national questionnaire postal survey was conducted with 7976 children of 10, 12, and 14 years old in 110 primary (5-11 years) and 59 secondary (11-16/18 years) schools in 1994. We used a stratified random sample so selected that the findings could be generalized to the total relevant populations of children in England. To supplement the questionnaire, follow-up interviews were conducted in July 1995 with just over 1% of the sample in different schools throughout the country. The interviews offer data which enriches the survey and allows further investigation of particular themes and hypotheses suggested by it.

The aims of the research work reported here then are to collect evidence which will improve understanding of the complex nature of literacy in the 1990s and to provide information which will enable parents, teachers and the book trade to promote wider reading.

The Project Research Procedures

Questionnaire Construction

The questionnaire was constructed to mirror Whitehead's investigation insofar as this was possible. This replication would allow us to gather data which would enable analysis of change over time. We decided to jettison some elements of Whitehead's survey however. Much of the school-based information which was important in the educational context of the 1970s is no longer applicable, and some of the principles which underpinned Whitehead's survey are no longer acceptable, such as the judgement which divides fiction into quality and non-quality texts.

Whitehead's questionnaire is very well designed to probe deeply into children's voluntary reading habits and it forms the base of our questionnaire. Our over-riding concern in our design was to ensure that the questions asked investigated the choices that children make in their reading.

The Pilot Survey

A pilot survey was conducted with eight schools selected using the principles which underpinned the sampling in the main survey to ensure that there would be no problems with the procedures for distribution, administration and completion of the questionnaire during the main survey.

Sample Construction

The sample nature needed to replicate, as far as possible, that of the original survey.

Whitehead's original study employed a two-stage probabilistic approach.The general aim of Whitehead's strategy was to represent all school sizes and types, all LEAs, and the selected pupil age ranges. It was inferred from that strategy that implicit variables such as socio-economic indicators, school types, pupil ability and sex would be similarly represented.We accepted the need to achieve this degree of representativeness but we were aware of major limitations to do with cost and logistical support.

The strategy we adopted for school selection consisted of sampling from selected local authorities, maintaining representativeness by school size. The LEAs were chosen to span the main socio-economic regions typically recognised in educational and social research. The dominant descriptors here are rural, metropolitan and London, with qualifiers such as suburban and relative affluence allowing a more refined characterisation. Fifteen LEAs were ultimately selected.The overall population covered by these regions is about 8.3 millions, so it does comprise almost one-fifth of England.

The next step was to obtain data on the relative incidences of different sized schools. The DFEE at Darlington was able to supply us with breakdowns by authority and size, so we were able to extrapolate from likely response rates, school class sizes and desired final sample size.

Our selection of pupils was simplified considerably by using intact classes. The relevant ages determined which school year was to be involved. In order to achieve acceptable spread we requested two classes per school. The classes themselves were tutor groups rather than subject groups. This ensured even better representation since any possible ability or sex bias was avoided.

The sample was designed to be usable at several levels. The maintenance of representativeness across characteristics such as region and size means that each unit can be analysed separately, as well as within

the complete nationally representative sample. With very large samples such as this one, statistical significance can be so readily achieved that emphasis becomes more difficult to decide. Analysing smaller sub-samples allows a more refined analysis specification (ie.more variables together) whilst still maintaining statistical reliability.

The Main Survey Procedures

We designed a comprehensive database for all schools in the sample. Schools identified in the sample received an introductory letter requesting their assistance. A small team of researchers followed up those letters with a telephone call to each school to establish whether it was willing to participate in the project. The calls were used to establish information on pupil groupings, urban or rural locations and the number of questionnaires to be provided. The procedures for administering the questionnaires were discussed. A package was then despatched to the contact person in each school, containing a set of instructions

Over 9,000 questionnaires were distributed. The return rate was 89% giving a total return of 7,976 (10 year olds = 2,975, 12 year olds = 2,455, 14 year olds = 2,546).

The Interview Phase of the Project

The interview phase of the project aimed to interview 1% of the total sample: in the event 87 children were interviewed (just over 1% of the sample). We approached schools that had participated in the main survey, selecting our sample from different regions of England according to the divisions into metropolitan, London and other areas that we had operated with in the construction of the original stratified random sample.

We decided that one interviewer should conduct all of the pupil interviews to maintain reliability, and to allow development of ideas and investigations over the range of interviews. The interviewer we chose is an experienced teacher, skilled at working in one-to-one relationships with children.

We chose a semi-structured interview format to allow a clear structure with enough flexibility to enable the interviewer to respond to the children's points and to follow up interesting and unforeseen responses. Interviews took place in school in a quiet room set aside by the school for the purpose. The actual pupils chosen were randomly selected on the basis of having a birthday on or very soon after January 1st.

All interviews were tape recorded, with the children's permission, and the interviewer also took notes according to the schedule we had devised. After the interview period, the interviewer collated and wrote up the data in a descriptive form from her notes, including illustrative transcription material. The analysis of the data was carried out by the main project team.

The Statistical Analysis

The questionnaire responses were processed to facilitate analysis by two separate strategies. Firstly, the listings of items such as book titles and purchase outlets were retained as text information. They were organised and analysed using a word processing program.

The second strategy involved the use of quantitative analysis wherever the questionnaire items were suitable. In many instances the questions had been offered with categorised response options and these responses were translated directly into numeric codes. Similarly, where responses were themselves numbers, either these numbers or recoded versions were used in the analyses. Finally, for some questions, a new numeric code was generated in the form of a count or some similar coding procedure. The numeric data were coded and entered for computer analysis by the statistical package SPSS-X Version 3 (SPSS Inc, 1988).

Preliminary analysis consisted of generating descriptive statistics (essentially frequency distributions) for all the coded items (ie. variables). In the second stage the research questions were addressed in a series of two-way cross-tabulations. With such a large number of variables in the questionnaire, some selection was necessary for manageability. Various pupil indicators (especially sex, age, socio-economic and ethnic background) presented a major focus for the selection of tables whereby these variables were compared with other questions comprising the essence of the survey. Findings from the previous survey, and indications from statistical significance tests, were also used as a basis for the tabular selection.

It is important to emphasize that in this particular survey statistical significance could by itself be used as an indicator of educational significance. The very large sample necessarily leads to an excessively high number of significant tables (when tested using chi-square) within the normal conventions of probability levels of .05 and .01. Even with a more stringent level ($p < .001$) some judgement is needed about the social significance of a finding.

Problems with Categorisation

Findings are often analysed in terms of sex, age, socio-economic group and ethnicity. Obviously these last two categories are problematic. Socio-economic groupings here are labelled A, B, C1, C2, D/E and unclassified in accordance with the Registrar General's classification, which is based on the occupation of head of household. Children themselves designated the occupation of the adults they live with and clearly those designations are open to interpretation in terms of the categories. The normal caveats which would apply to any categorisation of people into socio-economic groups, need to be applied even more carefully in this case.

When considering the children's ethnicity, it is difficult to arrive at clear information and definitions. Children's self report on this necessarily openly phrased question means that the data may be unreliable, in an area of investigation which is anyway open to debate and discussion. In fact 4.5% of the sample did not provide information on ethnicity. The categories we worked with were agreed with the Racial Equality Council. The range of minority groups we ended up with was so large, and the numbers within each group were so small, that for the purposes of the analysis we identified two broad categories: those who identified themselves as white', and those who identified themselves as members of other groups. We are aware of the highly problematic nature of this categorisation, but working with the numbers of returns we have, it seemed the clearest way to proceed towards obtaining a broad-brush picture. The importance of considering ethnicity in relation to children's book choices led us to maintain this less than satisfactory categorisation, but in the event very few significant differences emerged between one broad group and another.

Main Findings

1. Over the last two decades book reading has increased for 10 year olds of both sexes, and for 12 year old girls. It has remained at the same level for 12 year old boys and for 14 year old girls. It has declined for 14 year old boys.

The following tables show the 1971 and 1994 findings on the average numbers of books read in the four weeks prior to the survey.

Table 1. Average number of books read by 10+ children , by sex

10+ boys 1971	10+ boys 1994	10+ girls 1971	10+ girls 1994
2.69	2.98	3.28	3.71

Table 2. Average number of books read by 12+ children, by sex

12+ boys 1971	12+ boys 1994	12+ girls 1971	12+ girls 1994
1.99	1.90	2.48	2.93

Table 3. Average number of books read by 14+ children, by sex

14+ boys 1971	14+ boys 1994	14+ girls 1971	14+ girls 1994
1.77	1.45	2.15	2.06

A T-test' was conducted to test the significances of the differences between the mean scores. Since the standard deviation for the 1971 survey sample groups was unknown it was assumed, for the sake of this exercise, to be the same as that in the 1994 survey groups. There are highly significant differences for 10 year old boys, and 10 and 12 year old girls. In each of these cases the number of books read has increased in the two decades between surveys. There is also a highly significant difference in the figures for 14 year old boys; here the number of books read has decreased. Differences in the figures for 12 year old boys and 14 year old girls are not statistically significant.

These are generally encouraging findings. Popular fears that the increase in other distractions for children in the 1990s has led to an overall decline in the amount of book reading are, on these figures, unfounded. There is a trend, though. For boys a statistically significant increase at 10+ becomes neutral at 12+ and a significant decrease at 14+. For girls a statistically significant increase at 10+ and 12+ becomes neutral at 14+.

These findings ought to be set alongside the finding that children read more periodicals as they get older (see finding 15). Magazines and newspapers provide important sources of information and advice and play a very significant part in young people's reading.

2. The average number of books read by children in the four weeks prior to the survey was 2.52.

Up to thirteen spaces were allowed on the questionnaire in which children could record the books they had read over the past four weeks. Of the 7976 children who responded, only three cited thirteen books, filling all the spaces.The average number cited was 2.52. This figure does not, of course, take account of the length of the books. In the1971 study the average number of books read by children in the previous four weeks was 2.40.

3. Most children read regularly, but there is a tendency towards fewer books being read as children get older.

When asked whether they had read any books in the month prior to the survey, 91% of 10 year olds responded positively. This compared with 81% of 12 year olds and 64% of 14 year olds.

4. More girls than boys read books regularly.

More girls than boys had read a book in the month prior to the survey - 84% of girls and 75% of boys.However, avid readers -i.e. those who read a large number of books - can be found in both sexes.

5. There is a clear pattern of decline in the amount of book reading from higher to lower socio-economic groups.

88% of children from the socio-economic group A had read a book in the month before the survey; this figure declines gradually to 76% of socio-economic group D/E. The average number of books read also declined from higher to lower socio-economic groups, from 2.92 in socio-economic group A to 2.40 in group D/E.

6. Children have very eclectic reading tastes.

Returns from the survey resulted in a booklist of 19,344 entries, a large number of which were repeated titles. This list was then re-ordered alphabetically by title and author, and for the different age and sex groups,to discover which were the most popular individual titles, authors and series. We were impressed by how many children were able to ascribe authorship accurately.

It immediately struck us that the children in our survey have very eclectic reading tastes. For instance, it is not uncommon to find respondents who are reading both Virginia Andrews and Charlotte Bronte or Jane Austen novels. One respondent had read Stephen King's Misery with Roald Dahl's George's Marvellous Medicine . One girl's reading in the previous month consisted of Enid Blyton's The Naughtiest Girl in the School, Cinderella , Having A Baby , and A Beginner's Guide to Feminism. One respondent's reading diet includes Charlie and the Chocolate Factory, and The Rabbit's New Home, with the Point Horror title Babysitter III. Another's includes Macbeth, A Midsummer Night's Dream, Diary of an Anorexic Girl, and Michelle Magorian's story Goodnight Mr Tom.

For both boys and girls this eclecticism increases with age. 14 year old boys read a wider range of books than 12 year olds, who in turn read a wider range than 10 year olds. This is also true for girls. However, series of books are especially popular with girls and many girls are reading the same series, particularly Point Horror. This complicates the picture. It would seem that there are two trends. In general girls read an increasing range of books as they get older. Those books that are read by large number of girls mainly occur in series.

7. Children of any one age are reading books of markedly different levels of sophistication.

The range of books being read by children of the same age is notable. For example, in one class the leisure reading of one girl is Cinderella while another is reading Nick Fisher's Pocket Guide to Sex. Some pupils in the same class are reading Enid Blyton and The Animals of Farthing Wood at home, while others are reading Stephen King's Pet Cemetery. It is noticeable, therefore, not only that individual tastes are eclectic, but that children of the same age are reading books with very marked differences in levels of sophistication in terms of language, plot and subject matter.

These individual profiles struck us as interesting and worth investigating further. In order to do this, we categorised the readers themselves into five broad types:

- reader solely of children's fiction;
- reader solely of adult fiction;
- reader solely of non-fiction;
- hybrid' reader, ie a reader of books from more than one category;
- unclassifiable, including children who had not read a book in the previous four weeks.

Obviously there are no hard and fast distinctions to be drawn between children's fiction' and adult fiction', or, indeed, between fiction and non-fiction. Nevertheless, this broad categorising of reader type has allowed useful distinctions to be drawn. In deciding upon the children's or adults' fiction categories, we considered where possible the marketing of the books and what that indicated about the expected readership. Books marketed for younger teenage children were put in the children's fiction category; books marketed for older teenagers as well as adults (eg Terry Pratchett's or Sue Townsend's books) were put into the adult fiction category. We included the distinction between fiction and non-fiction readers here because we wanted to consider the percentage of children who read only one or the other, particularly in relation to the often quoted idea that many boys tend to read only non-fiction.

Categorised in this way, over 50% of the sample are readers of children's and teenage fiction. A sizeable proportion (10%) of children read only what might be considered adult' fiction. More of these readers come from socio-economic groups A and B than other groups. It is also noticeable that adult' fiction is more popular with boys than girls at 12+, although by 14+ both sexes are enjoying books that might be enjoyed by their parents. Among these are books by Agatha Christie, Stephen King, Terry Pratchett, Tom Clancy, Virginia Andrews, John le Carre, and Alistair Maclean. The themes of romance, growing up and horror and relationships which figure importantly in children's reading choices at all of the ages appear in these choices in more sophisticated forms e.g To Kill a Mockingbird, Wuthering Heights, Jane Eyre, Little Women, Silence of the Lambs, Pet Cemetery, Dracula, Misery.

The figure of 16% of the children who are reading across the categories - both children's' and adult's' fiction and non-fiction - is an indication of the range and variety of children's reading patterns which struck us so forcibly as we read through their questionnaires.

8. Roald Dahl's books are overwhelmingly the most popular individual titles.

Roald Dahl's The BFG tops the list of the most often cited book title, with 267 mentions. This is followed by Matilda with 235 mentions, The Witches with 217 and The Twits with 212. Charlie and the Chocolate Factory is in sixth place with 197 mentions. Seven of the top ten titles, and ten of the top fifteen, mentioned are by Roald Dahl. This is even more notable since the books referred to are individual titles, whereas The Famous Five and Adrian Mole refer to series of books.

Children were asked whether they have a favourite writer or series of books. Of the 7976 respondents, 65% did name a favourite. 23% of the total sample named Roald Dahl as their favourite author - three times as many as named the second favourite on the list.

Higher percentages of socio-economic groups C2, then D/E and C1 name Roald Dahl as their favourite author than groups A and B. Overall, 24% of boys and 21% of girls choose Dahl as their favourite, but at age 10 his popularity is evenly matched between boys and girls (31% and 30% respectively). However, boys and girls at this age tend to like different books that he has written; it is notable, for example, that The Twits is a particular favourite amongst the boys but not amongst the girls. Dahl's popularity declines somewhat as children grow older: 30% of 10 year olds name him as their favourite, 26% of 12 year olds and 12% of 14 year olds.

9. Children's classics' are still being widely read.

Books which might be considered as children's classics' are being widely read: The Hobbit, The Secret Garden, The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe, and Black Beauty all appear in the top twenty most read titles. Lord of the Rings, The Wind in the Willows, Little Women, Alice in Wonderland, The Railway Children, Oliver Twist, The Diary of Anne Frank, Heidi, Treasure Island, are all in the top one hundred titles. Winnie the Pooh, Jungle Book, and Peter Pan also appear. It is likely that sometimes the Disney' versions are being read, though the original authors are regularly ascribed, which provides evidence to suggest that the originals are also being read.

In the next most popular one hundred titles other classic' titles appear: White Fang, Wuthering Heights, Jane Eyre, Animal Farm, Around the world in Eighty Days, Gulliver's Travels, Great Expectations, Kidnapped, To Kill a Mockingbird, David Copperfield, The Magician's Nephew, Pride and Prejudice, The Horse and His Boy, The Hound of the Baskervilles. One in six titles in our top two hundred then might be considered children's classics' and this does not take into account titles which many might consider modern classics' such as The Borrowers, The Iron Man, Watership Down, Charlotte's Web, Stig of the Dump, and The Silver Sword.

10. Children enjoy reading series of books. Enid Blyton stories and the Point Horror series are the most popular.

Titles in the Point Horror Series are very widely read. Twenty-eight titles appear in the top one hundred. 7% of children in the sample named Point Horror as their favourite series/author, making it the second most popular in the ranking. Girls at 10+ and 12+ particularly enjoy reading series of books - about one third of the top 60 titles for 10 year old girls are series, and by 12+ Point Horror is overwhelmingly the most popular. It is named by far more girls than boys as a favourite and by a higher percentage of social group A than any other group. As one might expect, the Point Horror series becomes more popular amongst older children - there is a leap in the series' popularity from 10 to 12 year old girls which is sustained and increased at 14.

Enid Blyton retains much of her popularity amongst younger children. 6% of all children surveyed name her as their favourite author, putting her in third place behind Roald Dahl and Point Horror. 15% of 10 year old girls, 6% of 10 year old boys and 7% of 12 year old girls named her as their favourite. Her popularity tends to increase as one moves down the social scale. In the 1971 survey Enid Blyton was the most popular author, named as such by 1604 children, compared to 498 in 1994.

11. The media have a strong influence on children's reading choices.

There is clear evidence of the influence of the media on the books children had read in the four weeks prior to the survey. Of the titles in the top one hundred the following, at least, have had a high media profile (usually either a cinema or television adaptation) in the last five years: The BFG, The Witches, Jurassic Park, The Secret Garden, The Lion The Witch and the Wardrobe, Madam Doubtfire, Winnie the

Pooh, Watership Down, Aladdin, Jungle Book, Robin Hood, Take That, Dracula and Little Women .

In the next most popular one hundred titles a number of other books appear which are clearly linked to media productions: The Wizard of Oz, The Mask, Beethoven, Honey I Shrunk /Blew up the Kids, The Shining, Beauty and the Beast, The Pelican Brief, Frankenstein, Gremlins, Free Willy, The Crystal Maze, Batman, Star Wars, Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy, Manchester United, The Little Mermaid. Therefore approximately one in every seven books in our list has some sort of media tie-in. However analysis of the question Do you have a favourite writer or favourite series of books?' offers another perspective on this finding, since media influence is less strong when respondents note their favourite author or series (rather than recording their actual reading in the previous month).

12. Very few children read only non-fiction, but seventy-eight percent of those that do are boys.

The absence of non-fiction in the top one hundred titles is notable. Only The Diary of Anne Frank and Take That are mentioned more than twenty times. The small percentage (2.8) of children who read only non-fiction is interesting, particularly in the light of much popular wisdom that suggests that boys at these ages are turning away from fiction to an exclusive diet of non-fiction. 10, 12 and 14 year old book-readers read predominantly fiction; when they read non-fiction it is most likely to be alongside works of fiction.

The figures in relation to sex show up interesting differences between boys and girls. Although only 2.8% of the total sample exclusively read non-fiction, 78% of those who do are boys. Boys are also more likely to be in the hybrid' reader category because of a greater taste for some non-fiction in their reading diet. Most non-fiction is read in the 12+ age range.

13. Adventure stories are the most popular genre at all ages and for both sexes.

We were interested in discovering the types of subjects that interested the children surveyed, feeling that subject matter is central to the choice a child makes, a judgement that was confirmed by the interview phase of the work. Many of the books often fell into broad genre-related headings, eg horror/ghost; science fiction/fantasy. However, the best strategy for classifying the books into categories that yielded useful information was by no means immediately obvious. We worked from the booklist to try to create coherent categories that would be inclusive. We eventually decided upon fourteen types. We grouped horror and ghost stories together; similarly, science fiction and fantasy, crime and detective, and war and spy stories. We created separate categories for school related books, sports related books and animal related books. We gave poetry books a separate category because we were interested in identifying which children are reading poetry. We grouped joke books, annuals, comic books and humour (often TV related) under the heading of comedy. A clearly important area of young people's reading relates to stories and information about growing up, and we decided on a single category to include romances, stories of relationships and teenage development (for example, Judy Blume's novels) and manuals about sex education or advice to teenagers. We created one category called Adventure', which included a great number of children's books (notably, the work of Enid Blyton and much by Roald Dahl) but which we extended to include works in which we judged that action was a prime feature. Adventure' therefore includes picaresque and quest novels and accounts of real life adventures and explorations. We needed some dump' categories and created three to attempt to draw out some distinctions. These were: Other Non-Fiction' for those non fiction texts which did not fit the subject categories; Other Fiction intended for Children / Teenagers' and an Unclassifiable' category.

We considered how best to approach the categorisation of fiction and non-fiction texts. We could see from our initial consideration of the whole book list that children who were, for example, interested in

horses would be likely to read both fiction and non-fiction that was clearly horse related. In the end, we decided that since we were interested in subject matter that attracted different children into reading, we would group non-fiction and fiction, high' culture and popular' culture together under category headings that reflected the subject matter of the texts. This, of course, has led to very broad selections of books within each category. The Animal Related' category, for example, contains Black Beauty, the Saddle Club series, Animal Farm, books on how to care for pets and diagnose their ailments, and The Animals of Farthing Wood.

It will be immediately apparent that the allocation of books to these categories could not be a completely exact science. We operated according to the rule that subject matter took precedence over the text form, except in the case of poetry. So an adventure story about animals or school was placed in the animal related or school category.

Of our genre categories, six appear in these thirty most often mentioned books. Adventure' is by far the most popular genre followed by Romance / relationships and growing up', then Horror', and Science fiction / fantasy', then Comedy' and then Animal Related Fiction'.The figures showing the percentages of boys and girls who read each type of book are revealing of very marked differences in children's reading choices.

Girls choose more romances, horror/ghost, school and poetry books. Boys choose more science fiction, comedy, sports and war/spy books. Adventure, crime and, to a lesser extent, animal related books are more evenly selected.

Children of different ages choose different types of book, although some book types are read fairly consistently across the three ages covered by the survey. Adventure is overwhelmingly the most popular category for 10 year old readers. An interest in books about animals is very strong in 10 year olds; this declines considerably as the children grow older. Horror and ghost, romance and relationships, science fiction and then comedy follow in order as preferences. Over 5% of 10 year olds choose to read poetry. 12+ year old children retain some of the younger children's appetite for adventure books, but are reading horror/ghost, romance/relationships and science fiction books in proportions that are similar to the older age group. Interest in comedy, sports related books and school stories declines as the children grow older. Readers at 14+ have a fairly evenly balanced diet of adventure, horror/ghost and books dealing with romance and relationships. There is a readership for science fiction and fantasy, but then a considerable decline to the percentage of children at this age who read crime/detective and animal related books.

The adventure' category of books was also very popular in 1971, as the following list of favourite authors indicates.

Author	**Number of children naming as favourite author, 1971**	**Number of children naming as favourite author, 1994**
Enid Blyton	1604	498
Charles Dickens	158	28
Agatha Christie	121	27
R L Stevenson	120	3
W E Johns	96	4
Alistair Maclean	57	8

Ian Fleming	56	2
C S Lewis	54	53
H G Wells	51	3
A Conan Doyle	45	9
Anthony Buckeridge	43	0
Louisa M Alcott	43	0
Jules Verne	41	0

14. One third of children in the survey had re-read one or more books.

Just over one third of the children questioned in the survey had re-read one or more books i.e. re-read a book they had read before, although the first reading was not necessarily in the four weeks prior to the survey.

Heavy readers (7+ books group) re-read marginally more than the medium readers (4-6 books group). However both these groups re-read over twice as much as the light readers. The average number of books re-read by heavy readers is 1.14, by medium readers is 1.03, and by light readers is 0.44.

There is a trend for younger children and girls to re-read. There is a marked decline in the percentages of pupils re-reading as they grow older. Above all, the figures evidence the fact that there is a good deal of re-reading taking place, which suggests that children are enjoying their books and returning to them as sources of interest, enjoyment or comfort (or all three!) This point is underlined by the data on unfinished books. Fewer children had left a book unfinished over the past four weeks than had re-read a book. Approximately 19% of pupils in the survey had left 1, 2 or 3 books unfinished.

15. Magazines, comics and newspapers are widely read by children of all ages. Twenty-four per cent of the sample regularly read five or more periodicals.

It is clear from the questionnaire responses that newspapers, comics (we define these as periodicals which consist wholly or mainly of stories told by means of picture strips), and magazines are widely read by children in all three of the age categories investigated. Certainly it appears that periodical reading amongst children has increased over the twenty year period since the Whitehead survey. In 1971, the average number of periodicals read per child was 3.10; in 1994, it was 3.26. The overwhelming majority, 83%, of children in our sample regularly read periodicals; this is slightly larger than the figure of 79% of children who had read a book in the four weeks prior to the survey. Whilst the figures cannot be directly compared, they indicate the amount of reading which is taking place.

The number of different periodicals being read by individual children is notable. Over a quarter (26.9%) of the children in the sample regularly read five or more periodicals, 16% read 6 or more periodicals regularly and 66% read between 1 and 5 regularly .

Children at 10+ regularly read fewer periodicals than children of the same age did in 1971 (a mean of 2.62 compared to 3.29). However, whereas in 1971 the reading of periodicals declined as children grew older, the reverse is true now. There is a steady increase through from 10 to 12 to 14 years old.

Table 4. Regularly reading of periodicals, means by age for 1994 and 1971

Age	1994 mean for periodicals read regularly	1971 mean for periodicals read regularly
10+	2.62	3.29
12+	3.47	3.07
14+	3.78	2.91

This increase in periodical reading hold true for both boys and girls, but girls now read markedly more periodicals as they get older. Football magazines are the most popular periodicals for boys (Match, Shoot,) and are read by equal numbers of boys in the different age categories, and across socio-economic groups. Boys are the principal readers of newspapers, but newspaper reading increases with age for both sexes.

Teenage girls' magazines are by far the most widely read periodicals in our survey. What struck us as most significant was the dominant place of Just 17 in girls' reading. Nearly one in two girls in our sample regularly read this periodical.

16. Most children view reading positively and have positive views of themselves as readers.

Children were asked to complete this sentence with one or two words: I think that reading is ...' The overwhelming majority of responses fell into positive or neutral categories; approximately 10% of the children's responses were negative.

There is a tendency for younger children to judge reading more positively than older ones. 77% of 10 year olds responses are positive. 60% of 12 year olds and 57% of 14 year olds gave positive responses. Girls respond more positively than boys. 73.5% of all girls view reading in an unequivocally positive light compared to 57.5% of all boys.The majority views expressed about reading are positive in all soci0-economic groups.

Children were asked About how much reading do you think you do?' Most children in the survey thought they did an average amount' or quite a lot' of reading. The proportions of children who see themselves as reading large amounts diminishes as the children grow older.

There is a marked difference between girls and boys, with girls reporting that they read much more than boys. Over 34% of boys see themselves as not doing much reading, whereas only 19.5% of girls report the same. Across all social groups the largest percentage of children see themselves as reading an about average' amount.

Children were also asked Do you think you are good at reading?'Over 59% of the children thought they were good or very good at reading; only 9.6% thought they were not very good or poor.

Over 90% of pupils in each age group consider themselves average or better readers, although older children are less likely than younger ones to claim that they are very good' readers.

There is a strong relationship between a child's perception of being good at reading and choosing to read a lot. 93% of children who read a large amount consider themselves to be good' or very good' at reading. On the other hand, 28% of children who read only a little' consider themselves to be good' or very good' readers. However, even those who read least are likely to consider themselves of at least average ability.

17. Children read more books and have a more positive view of their abilities as readers if they live with a sibling who they consider reads a lot. For both boys and girls the influence of having other children at home who read seems to be more important than the influence of having keen adult readers at home.

Children in the survey were asked to list the adults they lived with, give the sex of the person and tick a box if their perception was that the adult read a lot. 66% of the sample live with at least one adult who, in the child's view, reads a lot. 57% of the children have a female adult, usually a mother, who reads a lot; 38% have a male adult, usually a father, who reads a lot.

The figures suggest that there is very little, if any, relationship between the child's perception of his/her own reading ability and living in a home with adult readers.

We did however also consider whether there might be a discernible influence amongst children who live with other children who are keen readers. 46.1% of the sample live with a child who reads a lot. 30% live with a girl who reads a lot; 21.4% live with a boy who reads a lot.

Here, children's perceptions of themselves as readers do seem to be influenced by having siblings who they perceive as keen readers. Boys and girls who live with another child who reads a lot do have a more positive view of themselves as readers than those who do not.

They regard themselves as reading more than their counterparts who do not live with siblings who are keen readers, and the numbers of books they cite bears this out.

The sex of the sibling who reads a lot is not relevant to this finding.

18. Children who speak a language other than English at home read slightly more than other children.

The questionnaire asked respondents whether they spoke a language other than English at home. 18% responded positively. No question was asked about the particular language spoken.

More than one in ten of children considered themselves literate in a language other than English.

Speakers of languages other than English are slightly more likely to read magazines comics or newspapers than other respondents. 85% regularly read this material (it is 82% for the sample as a whole). They are also as slightly more likely to read more books than other respondents.

Finding reading material in the home' language appears to be difficult however. Just 6.4% of the sample, half of those children who can read a second language, found it easy to find materials they enjoy

reading in this language.

The views these children have of themselves as readers are, as with the whole sample, very positive, with 90% considering themselves to be average or better readers.

19. Reading material is more often purchased from newsagents, general stores and supermarkets than from bookshops.

Since the survey was concerned with children's voluntary reading we were interested in how children acquired the material they read, so participants were asked Have you bought any books, comics, magazines or newspapers this year?' 88 % of the sample answered positively.

The individual purchase points mentioned were aggregated according to types of shop. Nearly half of all reading material is bought at newsagents. Only 12% of reading material is bought in bookshops.There is an obvious and significant increase in use of the major bookshops as children get older. This is also true of local newsagents and buying from kiosks.

Responses to the survey question asking children to tell us whether they had bought a book, a comic, a magazine, or a newspaper "this year" suggest that in relation to the total sample the most commonly purchased item was a magazine, followed by a book, newspaper, and then comic.

Book buying is highest in social group A. It is lowest in social groups D/E. However this pattern does not occur in relation to the purchase of comics, newspapers and magazines. Here there is a very much stronger purchasing habit in the lower social groups.

There was no significant difference between different ethnic groups in relation to the purchase of books or comics. However the percentage of those identifying themselves as white' who buy magazines is significantly higher than that of those placing themselves in other groups. The percentage of those identifying themselves as white' who buy newspapers is significantly lower than those placing themselves in other groups.

The figures relating to sex also offer clear patterns. Girls are more likely to buy books and magazines than boys. Boys are more likely to buy comics and newspapers than girls.

The pattern of book buying is similar in each age group, but this is not the case with newspapers, comics and magazines. Purchase of comics decreases dramatically after age 12, while purchase of newspapers and magazines increases.

20. Over 90% of children from all social groups report owning their own books

96% of the sample reported owning their own books.

Nearly 40% of children report owning 50+ books. Over 60% say they own 26 books or more. Across the age categories there is an equivalence in the percentage of children who say they own books.

However the trend is for older pupils to report owning a smaller number of books.

Slightly more girls (97%) than boys (95%) report owning their own books. Girls also see themselves as owning a larger number. Two thirds of girls claim ownership of 26 books or more. This is true for only half of the boys.

As one would expect therefore there is a positive relationship between the number of books children claim to own and the amount of reading they say they do. Children are also more likely to have read a book in the last four weeks if they say they own a large number of books.

And children who own a large number of books are also more likely to think they are good at reading.

There is a positive relationship between the number of books children say they own and borrowing from the public library. 78% of children who say they own 100+ books also borrow library books. The figure for those who own 10 or fewer books is 59%. Children also tend to borrow books more frequently from a public library the more books they own. Almost half of those pupils who claim they own 100+ books also say they borrow library books at least once a month. Only 28% of those children who own 10 or fewer books borrow from the public library at least once a month.

21. Over 70% of children say they borrow books from the Public Library.

As children get older, they borrow library books less frequently. Ten year old children are three times more likely to borrow books on a weekly basis than 14+ year old children. Over half of all 14+ year old children say they borrow books only sometimes', whereas the figures are less than this for younger children.

Girls say they borrow more library books than boys do. Girls also say they borrow books more frequently than boys do. Of the 28% of children who say they never borrow books, the larger percentage is boys. 41% of girls say they borrow books at least monthly, whereas this is true for only 33% of boys.

The largest percentage of children who say they borrow library books are from social group A where four in every five children report borrowing. There is a steady decline in borrowing levels from social group A to social group D/E. However, it is particularly notable that the children who say they borrow books the most frequently i.e. on a weekly basis, come from socio-economic groups C2 and D/E.

22. Children who read the most watch least television.

Nearly all children in the survey had watched television during the previous evening (95%). The majority (57%) say they had viewed for 21/2 or less, but over a quarter claim to have watched television for more than 31/2 hours.

The children who report watching the most television are in the 12+ category where 30% claim to have watched television for at least 31/2 hours the previous evening. By comparison, a quarter of children in the 10+ and 14+ categories report this amount of viewing. Boys claim to watch television for longer periods of time compared with girls. Of those children who say they spend 31/2 hours or more watching television, 30% are boys as opposed to 22% of girls.

Heavy readers are more likely than others to claim to have watched little or no television the previous evening. Those children who had read no books in the previous four weeks claim to watch the most television (more than 31/2 hours). However, although there is a slight trend for children who are reading the most heavily to claim to have watched less television, it is also the case that nearly 20% of those children who had read 7+ books over a four week period, also claim to have watched more than 31/2 hours of television in one evening.

23. Approximately two thirds of all children had done some reading in the evening previous to the survey. The amount of reading children do in the evening decreases with age.

65% of children in the survey reported doing some reading during the evening prior to the survey.

Younger children are more likely to report reading during the previous evening. They are also more likely to report having read for longer periods of time. Of those children who say they had not read at all, the largest percentage is of 14+ year old children.

More girls than boys report reading during the previous evening. 70% of all girls respond positively compared with 60% of boys. More girls say they had read for longer periods of time than boys. However there is no significant difference between the sexes for those children who report large amounts of reading (at least 21/2 hours).

There is a marked increase in the percentages of children in the lower socio-economic group who reported not reading in the previous evening. However, for those children who claim to have read the most (more than two and a half hours), there is a notable similarity of response across all social groups.

24. There is no significant relationship between the amount of time children claim to spend in computer use and the amount of time they claim to spend reading.

The percentage of the sample who reported using a computer in the previous evening was 44.5. Of those who responded positively the vast majority (72%), say they had used the computer for one and a half hours or less.

More 12+ year old children report using a computer during the previous evening than any other age group. Computer use is lowest with 14+ year olds. There is a slight tendency for younger children to use a computer for longer periods of time.

Approximately twice as many boys as girls report using a computer during the previous evening. Boys also claim to spend longer periods of time using the computer.

The findings do not significantly link use of the computer with socio-economic group or ethnicity. Similar percentages of children from all social groups report using a computer the previous evening. However, there is a relationship between the time children claim to spend at a computer and social group. Children from the lower social groups spend more time using computers. Almost 5% of children from social group D/E report using a computer for more than three and a half hours; for social groups A , B and C1 less than half this number report similar usage.

There is no significant relationship between children's reported use of a computer and whether or not they claim to have read the previous evening. Similarly, there is no significant relationship between the

amount of time children claim to spend in computer use and the amount of time they claim to spend reading during the previous evening.

There is also no link between the amount of time children claim to spend with computers and the number of books they report reading.

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